

WUNDER BEACH

I arrived at Wunder Beach on 31 May 1968, aboard a Korean LST, from Da Nang. The LST moored up to a causeway that extended about 50 yards from the beach. It was about 2:00 PM and the navy beach master seemed to be in a very foul mood. He cursed the Korean sailors, I don't think they understood what he was saying, and anyone else that didn't stay clear of his position. My first impression of Wunder Beach was that it was very hot there, the sand was white with sand dunes, and there was very little vegetation. The Barc CQ tent was on the beach and situated on the nearest sand dune. The tent had sandbags stacked about three feet high on each side with a little hole for the entrance. The company clerk took our paperwork and turned us over to an E-6. I never met the CO, rarely saw him, and have no ideal his name. I do remember a large sign saying, "Welcome to Wunder Beach Home of Sunders Wunders."

The E-6 informed us that we were presently homeless and would continue to be homeless until we built our own home. He showed us where the sand bags were located, pointed to a good spot and suggested we get started. A bunker goes up pretty fast when you set your mind to it. No one shows you how to build a bunker it's just something that seems to come natural. The five of us completed our home late the next day. We were issued our M-16 and ammo the next day and assigned to a barc. Each barc crew lived in the same bunker so I had a new home and new roommates. The bunkers were comfortable enough, it was May so no rain, and I actually had a mattress for a bed. Rats grow to very large sizes in Vietnam.

You were expected to be on your barc before 7:00 AM. There were nine barcs when I arrived, a high sand dune bulldozed around each one of them. There was a tenth barc sitting outside the perimeter, I'm not sure why it was there, but it was used for spare parts. One trip to pickup spare parts found about twenty NVA living in its hull. If a seatrain was offshore we would work two shifts, the main project was to get it offloaded and out of there as soon as possible. On the beach we would load a couple of stevedores and enough 5th Mechanized Division people to drive the equipment off after we arrived back at the beach. One tank could fit in our deck or two APC's. Each trip, which were short runs, it was a tank or two APC's, I don't remember offloading anything else, until the seatrain sailed away. Everything was well organized each piece of equipment started up and drove off the deck. The weather was clear and the seas for the most part calm. We must have carried all the 5th Division tanks and APC's thru Wunder Beach. One night around midnight a fire fight broke out on the perimeter, we were headed back to the beach with a load, and I could see all the tracers, green (NVA), red (OURS) and night flares lighting up the sky. It was almost beautiful, but Wunder Beach could be a very dangerous place.

I probably spent more time on the perimeter than I did on the barcs. All the new guys got lots of guard duty. I really didn't mind, the 1st Cav pulled our security and I went thru basic training with most of those guys. I met different friends every time the Cav changed the guard. The 9th Division 3/5 Cav provided the armor support this is the famous ring of steel group about which a book was written. The perimeter stretched in a large arc surrounding our working area from beach to beach. From one beach point to the next was probably about two miles. The arc to the center point was probably about three miles. The perimeter was a bulldozed sand dune stretching the whole length of the perimeter. It was about four feet high and interrupted about every twenty yards by a bunker. There were nights when the perimeter was surrounded by armor. There was a

tank and two APC's between each bunker all the way around the perimeter. I felt very comfortable on the perimeter.

Entertainment was in short supply on Wunder Beach. I remember seeing one show consisting of a female band and there was never a movie. We did have a club that we called the Barc club. It had two refrigerators full of beer and a reel to reel tape deck that provided music. The mess hall was a tent and the food barely edible, but if you wanted to eat there was no other choice. A small shack was the PX, you went to the window and pointed to what you wanted, usually there wasn't much to point at. No laundry, I had two uniforms of which I washed at a water buffalo when the chance arose. When I first arrive there was no shower. You washed at the water buffalo, non-portable water. Later when we did get a shower installed you would wait in a long line for this privilege. If you had a medical problem they loaded you up in a ¾ ton truck and drove you to Dong Ha. I did play a little volleyball late in the evening between barc duty and guard duty. Of course, there was the ocean and the beach, but I never had time to go for a swim.

The last days were the worst. We dismantled our camp, everything was returned to nature. The sandbags were cut open and the sand released back on to the beach. All building, what few there were, are torn down. All that is left are the Barc club and the CQ tent. There were three platoons of barcs. I was in the 540th and it was the last to leave the beach. A typhoon was headed our way and we watched as the other two platoons, six barcs, loaded up offshore on Navy LSD's and left on the way to Cam Rahn Bay. You could load three barcs on a LSD. Our LSD was delayed by the storm so we waited on the beach. That first night the wind blew the CQ tent away. We had stacked sandbags on the tent stakes and around the tent. I never saw anything leave an area as fast as that tent. We were lucky no one was injured by flying tent stakes and sandbags. About five of us migrated to the wooden Barc club. We could hear explosions on the perimeter and found out it was claymores mines blowing up. When the water reached the mines they would short out and explode. It didn't take the water long to reach the club. So we slept on the barcs. The water kept rising and we kept moving further inland. Three days later the sun came out and we waited on the beach for our LSD. It appeared offshore we loaded up and headed for Vung Ro Bay.

Thomas Moon

BARC OPERATIONS VIETNAM
PART 1, WUNDER BEACH
BY TOM MOON

To my surprise there seems to be a lot of interest in the barc (larc LX). On this page I intend to give you some ideal of the job the barc performed in Vietnam. I won't dwell upon the techical aspects of the barc, I have a link where you can get all the specifications. These pages will give you a daily account of what it was like to work and live on the barc.

I arrived in Vietnam on May 20, 1968, and I completed my obligation to the US Army on June 7, 1970. My two years in Vietnam were spent almost entirely on the barc. The barc unit at Wunder

Beach was designated as a Barc Detachment, it consisted of three platoons and ten barcs. When three barcs reached Vung Ro Bay, after departing from Wunder Beach, it was assigned to the 119th Transportation Company. Later, at Vung Ro Bay the barcs became the 540th Barc Detachment. Finally, when the barcs moved to Phu Hiep it became the 540th BARC Trans. The mission of the barcs at Wunder Beach was what the ambibs were designed for, short runs from ships anchored offshore to a flat calm beach. The mission from Vung Ro Bay to Phu Hiep and Tuy Hoa was completely different. The barcs were no longer doing what they were designed to do, they became mike boats with wheels. I will go into more detail about the run from Vung Ro Bay to Phu Hiep in Barc operations part 2.

Wunder Beach was about fifteen clicks south of the DMZ. I finally got to Wunder Beach on June 2, 1968. I say finally, because about ten days were wasted at a replacement center in Da Nang, supposedly waiting for transportation to Wunder Beach. I can tell you that a replacement center is no place for a PFC. I was assigned duties ranging from KP to mortuary duty. To this day if it is a real hot day, the radio plays any Rolling Stones song and the feeling is right, I can still smell the Da Nang Mortuary. Enough of that thought or I'll end up in the bar at the Waipahu Outback Steakhouse and this page will never get written. In the army when you get where you don't think you can stand it any longer at the place you are at, arrangements will be made to send you to a location that is even worse. Late one evening I pulled out of Da Nang Harbor on a Korean LST headed for Wunder Beach.

We arrived at Wunder Beach early the next afternoon. The first thing I noticed about Wunder Beach was how barren it was, sand dunes, some scrub trees and a few tents. This would turn out to be the high rent district, the closer we got to where I was going to live the more barren the environment became. Then an E-6 lead us to a vacant sand spot between bunkers and introduced us to our new home. Of course, we would have to build that new home, everyone at Wunder Beach lived in bunkers.

It took several days to build home. We had to build our home between other assignments. Perimeter duty being the most frequently assigned detail. Out on the perimeter I met several of the guys I had gone thru basic training with at Ft. Polk, LA. They were with the 2/5 1st Calvary Division. It was great to see those guys again. They also spent a lot of time on our perimeter, but they considered it R&R.

Some of the more vocal of the new guys started complaining about pulling too many detail and not enough time, actually none, on the jobs for which we were trained. This reached the right ears and everyone was to a barc and a crew chief. Training at FT. Story, VA. was divided into two sections, operators and engineers. Operators were assigned to run the barcs and engineers to fix the barcs. Therefore, while the operators looked important sitting around the wooden shacks built on the barcs sipping sodas, the engineers spent a good portion of their time in the bilges of the barc and smelling like diesel fuel. This caste system would be forgotten in the coming months when we became short handed and everyone would have to share all duties. Operators would engineer and engineers would operate. All one happy family.

With new crew chiefs and barcs also came new homes. Each barc crew had a bunker and you moved into a vacated area of the bunker and put up your cot. New barc, new home, new faces,

and new odors. This was a no frills life style you lived out of your duffle bag and kept your M-16 close at hand. I adjusted to living in a bunker, but I didn't adjust well. I didn't mind the living conditions as I didn't like the local residents. Vietnamese wharf rats seem to be highly territorial and have the temperament of drill sergeants. They grow to large sizes and will bite with any opportunity. It was so much better to take my blanket and go sleep on the barc if it was engaged in operations.

Most days were uncomplicated, get to the barc before 7:00 AM, do the maintenance check, check all liquid levels, and complete a detail assigned by the crew chief. This could include cleaning, painting, or some other unexciting job. New engineers did not do mechanical work on the barc, if you did even the simplest thing on an engine you were watched closely by the crew chief. Being a good engineer or operator would take patience, you would have to earn the right to be in a position of responsibility in the 540th barc. I do think this the main reason the 540th had very few casualties and lost equipment in Vietnam. The best people were leading the way.

During July 1968, at Wunder Beach, the barcs were running twenty-four hours a day. The 5th Mechanized Division equipment, jeeps 3/4 and 2 1/2 ton trucks, M113, and M-60 tanks were arriving from the States aboard large ships called Seatrans. The Seatrans would anchor close to shore, the barc would pull along side and a M-60 tank or two M-113's would be lowered onto the deck. The barc would make a quick run to the shore, pull upon the beach, drop the barc's ramp and someone would drive the equipment from the barc on to the Republic of Vietnam. Maintenance on the barc was simple, keep the fuel, oil, and air filters clean and the four 761's would run smooth as silk. This was the job the barc's were designed to accomplish and I remember the operation going off like clock work. There was a control tower on the beach that kept an eye on everything and directed everyone to the right places via radio. It was mostly stress free for the operators. They would engage the marine gear on the barc when the stern touched the water and ease the land transmission out of gear when the wheels no longer touched the shore. Just like the manual said it should be done. Things would be different at Phu Hiep because there would be no manuals for that operation that would last for well over a year. Charlie rarely showed his head at Wunder Beach, but the Cav got angry one night when the club stopped serving them beer and gassed us.

All things must end and the operation at Wunder Beach slowed in August and came to an end in September. Barcs are great, you can drive them on land, sail them on the sea, and then drive them onto a Navy LSD (landing ship dock) when you want to transfer them to another location. After a nasty experience with a typhoon, the last barcs (540th platoon) left at Wunder Beach, loaded upon the LSD and headed to Vung Ro Bay. The other two barc platoons had left aboard LSD's prior to the typhoon, it is my understanding they went to Cam Ranh Bay where they were deactivated. The LSD can fill its deck with water lower the ramp and the barc can drive right in. As the LSD gets underway, it lifts the ramp, pumps out all the water and the barcs are left high and dry on the deck. Hey, who thought of all this great ocean equipment. Three days of excellent Navy hospitality and we arrived at our new home, Vung Ro Bay.

NOTE: The author suggested the following site
<http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/Barracks/9930/VUNGROBAY.html>